

NOT ALL FAITH IS A SAVING FAITH

Not all “faith” is a saving faith. There is such a thing as “a spurious faith” which is to say it is false and bogus.

Paul told the Corinthians that they were saved by believing the gospel “unless you believed in vain” (1 Cor. 15:2). A vain faith is a bogus faith that has no real root in the heart. It is the stuff of apostasy that professes for a while, but there is no real heart commitment as required, as seen in Romans 10:9-10.

In John 2:23, it says that “**many believed in His name**,” but the text then goes on to emphasize that Jesus did not commit Himself to them because He knew what was in them. The qualifiers in verses 24-25 seem to indicate they really had a bogus faith, with the ongoing emphasis leading into chapter 3 showing that one must be born again, rooted in receiving Christ by believing in His name (cf. Jn. 1:12-13).

The word “**believed**” in John 2:23 and the word “**commit**” in verse 24 are the same word in the Greek (i.e. “**pisteuo**”). More literally, the sense is, “Many believed in Jesus, but Jesus did not believe **in them**.” Jesus had no faith in their faith!

In John 8 Jesus spoke to the many who “**believed in Him**” saying, “**If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed.**” (Jn. 8:30-31) In other words, a saving faith abides in Him, whereas a superficial faith does not (cf. Jn. 12:42-43). To these same people, Jesus just a few verses later said, “**You are of your father the devil**” (Jn. 8:44). Obviously, these “**believers**” were bogus!

In the parable of the Sower and the Soils Jesus spoke of those who believe for a while but then in time of testing fall away because they have no root (cf. Luke 8:13). In contrast, the true believers who receive the word with a “noble and good heart” persevere and bear fruit (Lk. 8:15).

In Acts 8 it says Simon the sorcerer believed, but then when he tried to buy the Holy Spirit’s power from Peter, Peter said, “**Your money perish with you**” (Acts 8:20) and told him that his heart was not right with God, and that he had no part or portion in this matter (cf. Acts 8:9-24).

James 2:19 says that even the demons believe and tremble, but obviously, they are not saved. And then James goes on to emphasize that a dead faith is not a saving faith (Ja. 2:20-26).

So clearly not all faith is a saving faith! Some faith is superficial and shallow and does not emanate from the heart (Rom. 10:9-10). Bogus faith is merely intellectual and experiential. It looks to Jesus for what it can get out of Him versus bowing before Him for WHO He truly is. A spurious faith is self-oriented instead of being truly God-oriented.

It is true that "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them," but this truth must be personally applied, which is where the "word of reconciliation" comes in (2 Cor. 5:19). We plead with people to respond in saving faith and thus be reconciled to God. As Paul warned, it is possible "to receive the grace of God in vain," which means in a bogus manner (2 Cor. 6:1-2). Paul addressed the Church at Corinth as "saints" (2 Cor. 1:1) but at the same time in the same letter he challenged them as a group to examine themselves "as to whether you are in the faith" (2 Cor. 13:5). Christ died for the ungodly (Rom. 5:6), and we are justified on the basis of faith alone (Rom. 4:5), but it must be the right kind of faith - a kind of faith like Abraham had (Jn. 8:39) - which is a life-changing kind of faith.

The Scripture places tremendous emphasis on WHO Jesus is as seen in the gospel of John (the gospel of BELIEF). We must believe in HIS NAME as it says over and over (Jn. 1:12; 3:18; 20:31). His NAME is Who He is. His Name is Jesus (God-Savior - Matt. 1:21); His Name is Lord (Phil. 2:11). Implicit in believing on the LORD Jesus Christ is believing in Him for Who He is as Lord. It is not enough to believe ABOUT Him - we must believe ON Him. Paul, in his most personal testimony, said he counted everything loss "for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord," which results in "the righteousness which is from God by faith" (Phil. 3:7-9).

One of my favorite gospel texts is 2 Corinthians 4:3-6. It makes the case airtight and undeniable that seeing Christ as Lord is what it means to savingly believe the gospel.

2 Corinthians 4:3–6 (NKJV)

3 But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing,
4 whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them.

5 For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus' sake.

6 For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

When one in faith truly sees Jesus for WHO He is as Lord-God, that is a heart-changing/life-changing reality! “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation, old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.” (2 Cor. 5:17) “We all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.” (2 Cor. 3:18)